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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN ORTHODOX PATRIARCH REACHES OUT TO ST PETERSBURG'S YOUTH

¶1. (SBU) Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill addressed an audience of over 8,000 students at the Ice Palace Stadium in St. Petersburg on May 29, the second in a series of large-scale appearances made recently by the Patriarch. The Patriarch's hour-long address struck a very Western tone and at times seemed to contradict his general message about the basic incompatibility between Russia's national values and those of the West. Interestingly, he both began and concluded his speech with Martin Luther King's immortal phrase "I have a dream!" and devoted much of his address to the individual pursuit of happiness. However, his address was not purely upbeat and secular. He continued to warn young people about the modern world's many dangers, such as drugs and alcohol. He also emphasized the uniqueness of Orthodox Christianity, which he asserted affords the faithful a direct line to God.

¶2. (SBU) After his speech, Kirill held a brief question and answer session with his audience. In response to a question regarding the Orthodox Church's support of the current government, Kirill stated that the government's attitudes and ideology correspond closely to the interests of the Church. He also said that as the government's actions defend Russia's national interests, they were therefore, a priori, the correct actions.

¶3. (SBU) Comment. The new Patriarch obviously feels very comfortable in "the modern world" away from the churches and monasteries - he drives a motorcycle, regularly uses the internet, and has increasingly found a common language to communicate with Russia's youth. Kirill's youth rallies, along with the rebranding of the Patriarchy into something more youthful and modern (and fully synchronized with the current Russian government's policies), demonstrates not only an increasingly aggressive campaign to improve the Church's public image, but also the evolving symbiosis between the ideologies of the Orthodox Church and the Russian government. Many people welcomed his fresh approach and embrace of Russia's young people. End Comment.

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